

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-04 L-03 MC-02 OMB-01 TRSE-00 IGA-02

EB-07 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 AID-05 ACDA-07 /049 W

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P R 131821Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0588

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY PANAMA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

JCS WASHDC

USCINCSO

S E C R E T MANAGUA 3342

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, PFOR, HO, CU, NU

SUBJECT: RATIONALE FOR M-16A1 RIFLE REQUEST

REF: STATE 149438

SUMMARY: GON REQUEST FOR PURCHASE OF M-16S LINKED TO CONTINGENCY MOBILIZATION PLAN. 6,000 FOR DISTRIBUTION TO ALL ACTIVE NATIONAL GUARD PERSONNEL AND 4,000 FOR REPLACEMENTS AND RESERVES IN CASE OF A CALL-UP. EMB BELIEVES THAT GON REQUEST IS MINIMUM RESPONSE TO CONTINGENCY AND RECOMMENDS APPROVAL OF EXPORT LICENSE FOR FIRST 6,000 WITHOUT ANY STRINGS REGARDING PURCHASE OF REMAINDER OVER UXT FEW YEARS. END SUMMARY

1. NATIONAL GUARD (GN) HAS EVENTUAL GOAL OF STANDARDIZING ALL EQUIPMENT, A COURSE WHICH HAS BEEN CONSISTENTLY URGED BY MILGP AND OTHERS FOR OVER 20 YEARS. IMPORTANT PART OF THIS PROGRAM IS REPLACEMENT OF ALL RIFLES CURRENTLY IN GN INVENTORY WITH M-16A1S. AT PRESENT EVERY MEMBER OF GN HAS A RIFLE ISSUED TO HIM, REGARDLESS OF FUNCTION. IN ADDITION, WE ESTIMATE THAT 8,000-10,00 MORE RIFLES OF VARYING MODELS, MAKES AND VINTAGES ARE STORED IN GN

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WAREHOUSES. GON WOULD UNDERTAKE TO DISPOSE OF THESE WEAPONS,

WE ASSUME THROUGH COMMERCIAL SALES, ONCE SUFFICIENT AMOUNTS OF M-16S RECEIVED.

2. GN HAS MEDIUM-RUN PLAN TO ACQUIRE 10,000 M-16S. THIS WOULD INCLUDE APPROXIMATELY 6,000 WHICH WOULD BE FOR IMMEDIATE DISTRIBUTION AND REQLX
EEMENT OF WEAPONS CURRENTLY CHECKED OUT BY ALL GN
PERSONNEL. THE REMAINDER WOULD BE FOR A CONTINGENCY CONDITION OF

MOBILIZATION; WHEN THE GON BELIEVES THAT IT COULD CALL UP ABOUT 4,000 ADDITIONAL MEN WHO ARE NOW RESERVES, AUXILIARIES OR POLITICALLY RELIABLE PRIVATE GUARDS.

3. THE HYPOTHETICAL ENEMY FOR THE MOBLIZATION CONTINGENCY IS HONDURAS. GON HAS VIEWED WITH SOME APPREHENSION GROWING BUILD-UP OF HONDURAN AIR FORCE AS WELL AS OTHER ELEMENTS. GIVEN GON DOUBTS ABOUT THE POLITICAL STABILITY OF THE HONDURAN REGIME AND WHAT IT PERCEIVES AS THE PRESENCE OF ANTI-SOMOZA ELEMENTS WITHIN THE HONDURAN MILITARY WHO MIGHT COME TO POWER SHOULD ANY SHIFTS OCCUR, GON CAN EASILY CONTEMPLATE AN INCREASINGLY ANTAGONISTIC RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS NEIGHBORS NIORWTUA IS CONCERNED THAT IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES HONDURAS MIGHT SERVE AS A REFUGE AND SUPPLY BASE FOLJ FSLN GUERRISLLA OPERATIONS WITHIN NICARAGUA,23034#-06.-8\$3\$ 8,\$843:5)6 ?6 :7?-.
THE SITIATION COULD ESCALATE FROM THERE INOM SMALL, AND THEN LARO-SCALE BORDER CLASHES FOR WHICH SUPERIORITY OR PARITY OF NICAAGUAN FORCES WOULD BE PROBLEMATICAL GIVEN THE PRESENT LEVELS OF EQUIPMENT AND PREPAREDNESS.

4. WHILE THERE ARE APPARENTLY STRONG PRESSURES WITHIN, TO ATTEMPT TO MATCH THE HONDURAN AIR BUILDUP, PRESIDENT SOMOZA HAS THUS FAR CHOSEN TO RESPOND MINIMALLY TO THE CONTINGENCY THREAT. HE HAS ESCHewed, THE MOMENT, THE ACQUISITION OF MORE SOPHISTICATED AND VERY EXPENSIVE, NEW WEAPONS SYSTEMS. THE CRUCIAL DECISION IN HIS REESPONSE THUS FAR HAS BEEN THAT OF OPTING FOR O-2 AIRCRAFT INSTEAD OF A-37S, HIGH PERFORMANCE THIRD-COUNTRY CRAFT, OR ANTI-AIRCRAFT MISSILE SYSTEMS. HE HOPES INSTEAD TO BE ABLE TO CLAIM SUPERIOR GROUND STRENGTH BY THE DEPLOYMENT OF MORE, AND APPROPRIATELY EQUIPPED,

INFANTRY TROOPS TO USE EITHER AS A DETERRENT TO HONDURAN PROVOCATIONS OR TO COUNTER ANY ACTUAL ATTACK. THE STANDARDIZATION AND ARMING OF
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THE CURRENT GN ROLLS AND MOBILIZED RESERVESL WITH M-16S PLUS FURNISHING

20 COMBAT COMPANIES WITH MACHINE GUNS USING COMPATIBLE AMMUNITION (U.S. MANUFACTURED BELGIAN FNS) IS THEREFORE CONSIDERED BY GN STRATEGISTS AS THE MOST FEASIBLE AND CHEAPEST WAY TO ACHIEVE A MORE ACCEPTABLE DEFENSE POSTURE.

5. GN ORIGINALLY DESIRED 1,000 M-16S IMMEDIATELY IN ORDER TO

BEGIN STANDARDIZATION BY ARMING TROOPS ENGAGED IN COUNTER-IN-SURGENCY. FOR THIS PURPOSE IT CONCLUDED THE COMMERCIAL CONTRACT DIRECTLY WITH COLT. THE NEXT 5,000 WERE TO BE OBTAINED MORE SLOWLY THROUGH FMS CONTRACTS AND THE REMAINING 4,000 AS SOON AS PRACTICABLE OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL YEARS. GN HAS NOW DECIDED THAT DIRECT PURCHASE OF 6,000 WEAPONS FROM COLT UNDER FMS CREDIT GUARANTEE OFFERS BEST PRICE AND FASTEST DELIVERY SCHEDULE. THE LONGER-RANGE ACQUISITION OF 4,000 ADDITIONAL, NEVERTHELESS, REMAINS AN INTEGRAL GOAL OF GON DEFENSE PLANNING FOR THE REASONS STATED ABOVE.

6. CONFUSION ABOUT THE QUANTITY, DELIVERY TIMES AND MANNER OF PURCHASE OF THE M-16S IS AN EXAMPLE OF TOO MANY COOKS SPOILING THE BROTH. THE GENERAL STAFF ORIGINALLY DECIDED ON OBTAINING THE FIRST 6,000 THROUGH FMS CREDIT AND HELD IN ABEYANCE SPECIFIC PLANS FOR THE ADDITIONAL 4,000. THE PRESIDENT'S SON, CAPT SOMOZA PORTOCARRERO, MUDDIED UP THE WATERS BY PUTTING OUT FEELERS FOR THE ENTIRE 10,000 IN THREE DIFFERENT TRANCHES, BEFORE HE FELL BACK TO THE ORTHODOX POSITION. NICARAGUA'S MILITARY ATTACHE WAS NOT WELL BRIEFED ON THE SUBJECT WHEN HE MADE HIS OVERTURE. WHILE IT IS CERTAINLY VEXATIOUS AND LIABLE TO RAISE SUSPICIONS ABOUT "HIDDEN PURPOSES", SUCH CONFUSION STEMS FROM THE GN'S WELL-KNOWN STRUCTURAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEM AND IS UNFORTUNATELY NOT UNTYPICAL.

7. COUNTRY TEAM BELIEVES THAT ULTIMATE GOALS OF 10,000 M-162) -,\$ 500 FN MACHINE GUNS SEEM REASONABLE AND JUSTIFIED IN LIGHT OF THE FOREGOING. IT APPEARS TO BE A CHEAP PRICE FOR GON TO PAY TO COUNTER AN ARMS BUILDUP AND A POTENTIALLY HOSTILE POLITICAL SITUATION IN A NEIGHBORING COUNTRY. NICARAGUA'S RESPONSE, WE THINK, IS MINIMAL AND ACTUALLY WILL DO MUCH TO DAMPEN SENTIMENT FOR NICARAGUAN PARTICIPATION IN A MUCH MORE TROUBLESOME ARMS RACE IN CENTRAL AMERICA. COUNTRY TEAM IS KEENLY AWARE NOT ONLY OF CONGRESSIONAL ANTAGONISM TO SUCH SHIPMENTS, BUT ALSO CONSCIOUS OF POTENTIAL FOR MISCONSTRUING U.S. MOTIVES ON PART OF DOMESTIC OPPOSITION.

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NEVERTHELESS, WE PERCEIVE NET BENEFIT IN APPROXIMING INITIAL 6,000 WITHOUT SEEKING ASSURANCES OF RESTRAINT ON ADDITIONAL 4,000, AND THEREFORE RECOMMEND THAT LICENSE BE APPROVED FORTHWITH.
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